

## BISMARCK AND HIS POLICIES\*

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It is curious that so little has been said about Bismarck as the creator of the Frankenstein monster of militarism, the political Theseus who sowed the dragon's teeth of frightfulness. It is doubly curious that Americans are so ignorant of the fact that it was the Imperial Chancellor who is largely responsible for the talk of the decadence of France, the perfidy of England and the general superiority of Germany. But if ever a nation was embodied in one man, it is in Bismarck, and it is his brood, multiplied a thousand fold, that is now showing itself true to type. All this is to be read not only between the lines but in the very lines of the Chancellor's chief biographer. And if history is to repeat itself and we wish to learn its lessons, we can go back to old Moritz Busch's *"Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of His History."* In this remarkable work, a "diary kept during twenty-five years official and private intercourse with the great Chancellor," there is a perfect mine of information as to the psychology of Prussianism. The writer is one of the underlings in the foreign office of the North German Confederation. As an understudy he has two prime qualifications for success—a phonographic memory and a perfect admiration for his chief. Called to 76, Wilhelmstrasse in the fateful year, 1870, Busch finds himself in the presence of his chief. Seeing him as he sits in a military uniform at his writing table with a bundle of documents before him, he feels as if he "stood before the altar."

This is the first step in the worship of his serene Highness, a worship which after the Franco-Prussian war and the consolidation of the German empire eventuates in the conclusion that the Imperial Chancellor is to be regarded as a man of iron character whose self-

confidence never fails: "Many will think that he must look back upon his deeds and creations with something of the feeling with which God the Father on the seventh day regarded the world he had made."

Thackeray, in his description of the Court of Pumpnickel, never reached such heights as does this Bismarckian Boswell. But despite his blind admiration for his chief, the secretary has kept his eyes open. He reproduces with photographic fidelity every detail in the personnel and surroundings of his master, from the ante-room where works Geheimrath Abcken, an official of the old school with his interests in poetry, philosophy, philology and art, to the country estate of the Prince himself, where the tall figure and the two big dogs with their eyes fixed upon his face "recalled the God Odin and his two wolves." This, then, was the figure which dominated the German foreign office and was the real power behind the throne; "the ministerial despot" who insisted that discipline was to be maintained and absolute subordination, so that every wheel of the machinery should work readily and promptly and in its proper time and place, a machine where acquiescence is the first and highest law, where there must be no stoppage caused by this or that individuality.

This is the scenario which received the imprimatur of the Chancellor. And the film itself was officially released at a later date, yet not until it had been censored by Busch's chief. Of the after effects of the German foreign policy we Americans have had some experience—with its inner workings we are not so familiar. In the very Fatherland some longed for the good old days of individuality and freedom prior to Bismarck's entry into office. But with the

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approach of the war with France there is nothing but to obey orders; the counsellors have no longer to offer counsel, but simply to regard themselves as instruments of the Chancellor's will, who, like other instruments. *Chargés d'Affaires*, Ministers and Ambassadors, have to use their knowledge and ability in carrying his ideas and intentions into execution. Strangely enough it was from one of the family which furnished materials for *Elizabeth and her German Garden* that a protest came against this "ministerial despotism." It was Count von Arnim who was offended at the expression made use of on one occasion by the Chancellor: "My Ambassadors must wheel round like non-commissioned officers at the word of command without knowing why." Moreover, one of these "senior clerks" was Count von Bernstorff, father of our friend of fragrant memory. Over his machinations as Ambassador to the court of St. James it is perhaps best to draw a veil.

These are authentic passages and authentic descriptions. As to the Chancellor's habitat no further comment is needed except the fact that his ministerial menagerie adjoined the Thiergarten. This was one of the Chancellor's favorite walks, an historic spot, for it was here that in the year of victory, 1866, the idea occurred to him of inducing Moltke to order the Prussian forces to cross the frontier, and thereby the Rubicon, twenty-four hours earlier than had been originally intended. And it was also there that the famous Ems dispatch was literally concocted. The French reply concerned the German demand that a Hohenzollern be placed on the Spanish throne. That reply was expressed with the customary Gallic courtesy and it looked as if his Most Gracious Majesty, the Prussian King, would be prevented by that courtesy from precipitating hostilities. But the Chancellor was able to alter the com-

plexion of things. Taking the telegram he boiled down those two hundred words to about twenty. It was the same dispatch yet "somewhat different—shorter, more determined, less dubious . . . . . The French were fearfully angry at the condensed telegram as it appeared in the newspaper, and a couple of days later, they declared war on us."

Here was high diplomacy, a word of the same derivation as low duplicity. That the Imperial Chancellor recognized the cognate root is naïvely confessed at a later date. Bismarck, says his chronicler, is regarded as a man of iron character, one—as has been already said—who must look back upon his deeds with something of the feelings of a Creator to his creation. This is so, but he also had softer moments, moments of dissatisfaction with his achievements. Thus in 1877 he complained that he had little pleasure or satisfaction from his political life, that he had made no one happy thereby, that, in fact, he carried unhappiness to great numbers. "But for me," he confessed, "three great wars would not have taken place, eighty thousand men would not have been killed and would not now be mourned by parents, brothers, sisters and widows."

But it would never do to portray the Iron Chancellor as an Achilles repining in his tent, a Solomon suffering from Weltschmerz. His Serene Highness himself eased his conscience by arguing that it was not so much his iron will as the power of the press that had done a great deal of harm: "It was the cause of the last three wars; the Danish press forced the King and the Government to annex Schleswig; the Austrian and South German press agitated against us; and the French press contributed to the prolongation of the campaign in France." This sounded very well and was meant for public consumption. But it must be taken with a grain of salt by those who know the history of the Guelph fund and

Bismarck's sardonic pleasure in what he called the reptile press. This was not yellow journalism, because it was so clever. Against alert enemies it would have been foolish to use scare heads and the big stick. It was much more effective to use innuendo and the poison of suspicion. It was here that Busch was employed to write his "friction articles." Such was the account of Count von Arnim as a "melancholy species of diplomatist," of an "exalted lady" at court as beguiled by Jesuit sweetmeats; of a Master of the Household who received "one of the highest Prussian orders" because of his lampoons upon the Chancellor. This is a sample of the semi-official friction articles; there were also those in "remote" journals, that is, not notoriously connected with the government. Such were the charges to be circulated and reproduced in the provincial journals that so and so was a "particularist," an upholder of states rights against the Prussian octopus. This was the work of the first-class reptile press. There were also smaller snakes to do the underground jobs. One example was the well-trained Buchner who sees to "launching something against Augusta," mother of the present Emperor, in "some low outside print."

The youngest cub reporter on an American journal would refuse to have anything to do with such "rough stuff" as attacking one of the first ladies in the land, but Bismarck's biographer is at pains to extract the "best passages" from the article in question. However, the whole matter seems so unnatural as to be improbable. We may, therefore, turn to other press methods which have since become painfully familiar to "idiotic Yankees." These were the inspired articles in the foreign subsidized press. This is how the scheme was worked in the Franco-Prussian war. Busch is at last at liberty to quote this passage from his diary of September 21, 1870:

The imperial emigrants in London have established an organ, *La Situation*, to represent their interests. Its contents are to be reproduced in the newspapers we have founded in the eastern districts of France, but the sources are to be so indicated as not to identify us with the views therein expressed: i. e., it must be understood that we are not endeavoring to promote the restoration of the Emperor. Our object is merely to maintain the sense of insecurity and discord between the various French parties, which are all equally hostile to us. The retention of the imperial symbols and formulas in despatches will prove of service in this respect; otherwise Napoleon or a Republic is a matter of indifference to us. We merely desire to utilize the existing chaos in France. The future of that country does not concern us."

*Mutatis mutandis*, this sounds familiar to American ears. Put Boy-Ed for Busch and the parallel is precise. And strangely enough, on the following day, Busch had something to say concerning the activities of Von Bernstorff, senior. The latter sent an article to the chief in order that certain charges of Prussian inhumanity towards the French might be refuted. The Chancellor has the easy answer of the *tu quoque*, and a refusal of these "shameful slanders" is at once dispatched to the London newspapers friendly to Germany. As dictated by the chief this is to the effect that it is true that a great number of villages have been burned down, but that French artillery fire has done this as well as German. Moreover, it is established by official reports that the inhabitants of Bazeilles, not in uniform, but in their blouses and shirt sleeves, fired out of their windows at our troops ..... The rest of the report comes from the stories of the unfortunate and exasperated villagers of a country where "even the government has developed an unexampled talent for systematic lying."

In this account two things are noticeable—a certain jealousy for the cleverness of French mendacity, and an attempt to cancel reports of German atrocities by a counter-charge of similar actions on the part of the French. Unfortunately that self-recording machine, Busch, is still automatically recording

impressions. In another passage he puts in juxtaposition the hanging of so-called *franc-tireurs*, and the setting on fire of a village by German soldiers drunk from French brandy. All this mutual recrimination might cancel itself, except for the fact there is a certain note of ghastly humor to make one doubt the Teutonic disavowals of terrorism. One passage recounts with relish the hunting of certain snipers through the French vineyards; another tells how, at Commercy, a woman came to the chief to complain that her husband, who had tried to strike a hussar with his spade, had been arrested: "The minister listened to her very amiably, and when she had done he replied in the kindest manner possible, 'Well, my good woman, you can be quite sure that your husband' (drawing a line round his neck with his finger) 'will be presently hanged.'"

There is a real anomaly in the blood-thirstiness of Bismarck, since he was a civilian with only a titular military rank. To the credit of the regular military staff it must be said that they showed less cruelty than the Chancellor. Indeed at one place the latter was in a bad temper because the proclamation threatening to punish with death a number of offenses against the laws of war had not been posted up. At another he declared that every village in which an act of treachery had been committed should be burned to the ground and all the male inhabitants hanged. Finally at Versailles when someone spoke of the last engagement, and said that a portion of the 1200 prisoners that had been taken were *franc-tireurs*. "Prisoners!" broke in the chief, who still seemed to be extremely angry. "Why do they continue to make prisoners? They should have shot down the whole 1200 one after the other."

In 1870 the regular fighting staff were more merciful than the non-combatant Chancellor. But the latter had a policy, and that was a policy of ruth-

lessness. Bismarck held that the kindlier affections had as little place in the calculations of politics as they had in those of trade, since the sole question he had to consider was what was to the advantage of the country. Political necessity was evidently at this time more exigent than military necessity and to the great Chancellor we may look, in some measure, for that policy of blood and iron which gradually supplanted feelings of natural pity among German officers. When at Versailles he was urged to spare the poor of Paris, who came out to search for potatoes, he held that they should be shot in order to reduce the city by starvation. And when the Parisians put up a stiffer resistance than was expected, he contended that war should be waged with iron and not with velvet gloves. Bismarck seemed to be fond of the tonic qualities of iron—for other people. He acknowledged with approval the sentiments of General Roon that "The Parisians have too much to eat and too little to digest—iron pills, namely, of which too few have been employed."

Here arose the embarrassing question of the "bombardment of Babylon." If the Crown Prince was indignant at certain correspondents who compared Chateaudun to Pompeii, the Chancellor had no such scruples. To him Paris was not the modern Athens, mother of arts and eloquence, but the modern Babylon, which must be destroyed. As if following the dictum of Frederick the Great concerning the high worth of the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier, Bismarck asked if it was true humanity to let masses of gallant soldiers fall a prey to the hardships of the investment by postponing an artillery attack, merely in order to save a hostile city from damage? The Freemasons of Germany had protested against the threatened bombardment, so had the Vatican, so had certain ladies of the royal family. But the Chancellor held

that neither masons, nor priests, nor petticoats should mix in politics. "Give me the position of commander-in-chief for twenty-four hours," he exclaimed, "and I would then give one command only, 'Commence the bombardment.'"

Sentimental and artistic considerations, then, had no place in the plans of Bismarck. The reason was not only the cruelty of the non-combatant, but a certain streak of Puritanism in his mental makeup. Paris to this Prussian junker was not the centre of arts but the centre of decadence. In an early "friction article" when "working up the Spanish question" the Chancellor dictated the statement that the French show themselves to be a decadent nation; that the present generation of Frenchmen do not know how to behave themselves but that young Germans are to be recommended as models for the youth of France. And, he continued, not only have the Gauls degenerated in manners but also in mentality. Here Bismarck said literally:

"The French are not so astute as people generally think. As a nation they resemble certain individuals amongst our lower classes. They are narrow-minded and brutal—great physical force, boastful and insolent, winning the admiration of men of their own stamp through their audacity and violence. Here in Germany the French are also considered clever by persons who do not think deeply, and their ministers are regarded as great statesmen because of their insolent interference in the affairs of the whole world, and their desire to rule everywhere. Audacity is always impressive."

It is hard to see how a nation full of physical force and audacity can be called decadent, but it is to be noticed that the adjective is used when Bismarck is in Germany. In France, however, with a personal knowledge of the fighting qualities of the enemy as shewn in battles from the Meuse to the Marne, the barbarous side of the French was emphasized. The Chancellor's rebuttal of the charges of German atrocities as suggested by Count von Bernstorff, senior, for English consumption follows the

usual plan of abusing the plaintiff. The "rebuttal" contains these statements: that there is no ill-treatment on the part of the Prussian troops, even when drunk, owing to the discipline which prevails among them, but the utter barbarism of the French nation covered with a thin veneer of culture, has been fully disclosed in this war. Elsewhere Bismarck delicately remarks that "if you peel the white hide off that sort of Gaul you will find a Turco under it." So when the chief heard of a sortie from Paris in which five hundred red-breeches were taken prisoners, he bitterly regretted that it was not possible to shoot them down on the spot.

The Gauls are decadent, they are barbarous, they are also envious. While the Germans possess the politeness of helpful, benevolent feeling, the French have not got it; they only know the politeness of hatred and envy. The genuine type of the Frenchman is one who cannot bear that another should play the flute better than himself. This characterization of the enemy is cancelled at a later date when the Prince, in a moment of bitterness, expressly stated that envy was "a national vice of the Germans; they cannot bear to see anyone hold a high and leading position for any length of time." But the initial charge of decadence is one to which the Chancellor constantly returned. After the capitulation of Paris he dictates an article calling attention to the contrast between the intellectual impotence of the French and their self conceit; and to the circumstances that they have had to trust to foreigners for their salvation. Upon the fall of the Empire they allowed themselves to be tyrannized over by Gambetta; then they placed their hopes in Garibaldi, finally they depended upon Poles for barricade heroes. In fine, scarcely another people in the whole world would condescend in such a pitiful way to borrow its heroes from abroad. With the

exception of these Parisians, who boast of being the cream of civilization, but who in reality are merely the redskins of the pavement, as empty-headed and weak-willed as savages, none would submit to be driven by energetic, although otherwise insignificant, foreigners towards ends that are in every respect opposed to their own interests. "Truly a repulsive and most pitable degeneracy!"

Statements such as these seem like private indiscretions, mere explosions of wrath against a stubborn foe. But they were more than that, they were diplomatic indiscretions, private explosions meant to reach the public. Just as in "working up" the Spanish question before the war, Bismarck ordered that "great surprise should be expressed" at the presumption of the French, so now, toward the close of the conflict, personalities were to be made part of a propaganda. If, for example, the Gauls can be made out to be greedy, that will serve to minimize the magnitude of the Teutonic demands. So it would be foolish to be forbearing since the danger lies in the incurable arrogance and lust of power which is part of the French character. And further, for the sake of the maintenance of peace, we Germans, continued the Chancellor, must secure ourselves in the future against attacks from a vain-glorious and covetous nation. Indeed, it is concluded, France is the sole disturber of European peace, whereas Germany is the great universal preserver of peace, and protector of international independence being "armed only for defense."

All this has a familiar ring: these Bismarckian utterances have become wall mottos for the present generation. Unfortunately the chief let the cat out of the bag when he later confessed that "but for the five milliards of 1871 we should have been close upon bankruptcy a few years sooner." This might be called a real indiscretion, except that it

was made a decade after the war and was also perfectly consistent with the character of the Iron Chancellor. He had won the fight and was not unwilling to boast how he had done so. Nevertheless the faithful and admiring Busch recounts not only the great but the small, for to him the retail is as much a matter of interest as the wholesale. So he records how Lieutenant ——— had had a consignment of French furniture forwarded to his mistress; how a cellar of first-rate wine had been discovered near Bougival; and how in reprisal for pictures taken by the French from Germany, others of equal value could be taken from the gallery at Versailles and sold to the Americans who "would give us a good price for them."

These are interesting cases of Teutonic thrift. They bear out recent information from our Dutch friends as to the care taken in the removal of Flemish works of art from Belgium. In like manner art-director Bode of Berlin has been keeping up the consistent Bismarckian policy of efficient attention to detail. But these are small affairs. Matters of larger interest engaged master and man. At first, for example, Bismarck considered the annexation of Alsace a "professorial idea"; but later he got Busch to write an article on "the inconceivable attachment of the Alsations to France, their voluntary helotry and the blindness which will not permit them to see and feel that the Gauls only regard them as a kind of second-rate Frenchmen." And now another second-rate race is to receive attention. This is England, the country which is "afraid of public opinion," because it prevents "international buckstering in all tranquility of mind"—England whose pious and perfidious government so taxes India that it deprives a large number of its people of their livelihood, which in turn weakens the population and makes it less capable of resisting cholera. This, incidentally, was "ma-



terial for an attack upon England" sent to Busch for him to work up. He is clever enough not to reverse the syllogism and to show that to lessen the population would lessen the taxes; instead he adds that England was also responsible for the extension of the scourge to West Africa and Europe, as, in order not to disturb her trade and shipping, she exercised no proper supervision.

All this throws a flood of light on the German diplomatic mind; it will explain how foreign secretary Zimmerman could write his famous Mexican note; it will also explain the statement of former Chancellor von Bülow in his *Imperial Germany* that while in art, learning and science the Germans might be superior to all other nations, in diplomacy "we are asses." Now the subsidized press with its friction articles might fool all the German people all the time, but they could not fool the foreigner. Unfortunately for Bismarck there was one stranger within his borders who was too clever for him. That was "The Englishwoman," the Empress Augusta, wife of Frederick, daughter of Queen Victoria, and mother of the present Kaiser. Whether or not the venomous press attacks engineered by Bismarck had something to do with the dropping of the old pilot, it was a sorry day for the German ship of state when the anti-British propaganda was launched. Some claim that no such propaganda was ever officially started; that the "*Gott strafe England*" business was one of the results, not one of the causes of the pres-

ent conflict. Sven Hedin has recently made this statement, but the great Swedish explorer is evidently more familiar with the wilds of Thibet than with the psychology of the Grand Lama of Ton-tonism.

Bismarck is as colossal and dominating a figure as a wooden Hindenburg. He had his *Denkmal*, but he did not have a wooden hide. He kept the old Emperor under his thumb, but not the Crown Prince Frederick. Consequently when the latter, with his weak physical constitution, began to show symptoms of strong political constitutionalism, the iron Chancellor started a fatuous campaign against Frederick's wife "for her whims, for foreign interests with danger and detriment to ourselves." The conflict between the two was of course irrepressible. The Empress came from a country where "*dei gratia*" was chiefly evident on the coinage; Bismarck from a land where the divine right of kings was an innate idea; where, as he exclaimed: "If I did not believe in a divine providence which has ordained this German nation to something good and great, I would at once give up my trade as a Statesman . . . . . if there is no divine commandment why should I subordinate myself to these Hohenzollerns? They are a Suabian family no better than my own . . . . . If I were not a firm believer in Christianity, if I had not the wonderful basis of religion, you would never have had such a Chancellor of the Confederation."

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